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PAPER NUMBER I

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**SOME ASPECTS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE
OF STRATEGIC SERVICES OPERATIONAL GROUPS
IN WORLD WAR II**

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SOME ASPECTS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE
OF STRATEGIC SERVICES OPERATIONAL GROUPS
IN WORLD WAR II.

I. ORIGINS AND USE IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER.

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INTRODUCTORY

The object of this series of papers is to examine one aspect of unorthodox warfare in World War II: the use of the Office of Strategic Services' Operational Groups. In Europe and in China these units penetrated behind enemy lines and disrupted communications, destroyed installations, organized, trained, and supplied resistance groups, assisted in waging guerrilla warfare, and supplemented regular Allied military operations.

The first paper will examine the origins and basic concepts of the Operational Groups and summarize their development and their performance in the European Theater. The second will discuss at greater length their use in the 1945 campaign on the Chinese mainland against the Japanese. The bibliographical note will provide a summary and analysis of the documents used, so that the reader may consult them for verification and for information on those matters not considered in the text. Supply and financial matters and routine problems of administration and organization have been deliberately omitted, because, while at times they provided much annoyance, they gave rise to no major controversies.

On the other hand, both papers emphasize two most important controversial matters which affected profoundly Operational Group training, personnel, and use in the field. The first was the conflict between two clearly-defined schools of thought concerning just what was to be the role of the Operational Groups in World War II. One school insisted

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that their function was "strategic" rather than "tactical" and that their value lay in their ability to deliver swift hit-and-run attacks against strategic enemy communications and installations. The other school insisted with equal vigor that they must operate only under the complete control of the Theater Commander or his delegate and must directly assist the regular tactical military operations. The second major point of emphasis is the question of Chinese-American relations and the way in which this affected the efficiency of the commando units. This was a political and diplomatic problem as well as a military one and had wide repercussions.

It is felt that study of these operations may throw light upon some problems faced by military planners: the political and psychological difficulties of conducting warfare by coalition; the language problem between allies; operational control of military units; the command function; the tactical use of military units measured against results obtained; and the question of how to combine for maximum effect the methods of both regular and unorthodox warfare. All these problems were faced in planning and conducting Operational Group China activities in 1945.

It is recognized, of course, that the identical circumstances of the summer of 1945 will probably never be reproduced. The way in which the foregoing problems of unorthodox warfare were met in 1945 may, however, lead to certain conclusions which might be of significance in planning for possible future operations of a like nature.

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I. OPERATIONAL GROUPS: ORIGINS AND USE IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPERATIONAL GROUP DOCTRINE

The Office of Strategic Services' Operational Groups were originally inspired by the example of the World War II British Commandos. At the end of 1941 General William J. Donovan, then Coordinator of Information, subsequently Director of the Office of Strategic Services from 1942 to 1945, and a long-time believer in unorthodox warfare, studied the Commando system and advocated strongly that the United States organize an "elite" corps along similar lines.¹

The Commandos had their origin in the military situation of the summer of 1940. The Germans were in undisputed control of the European coastline from Narvik to the Spanish frontier, while the British retained control of the seas and maintained their position in the British Isles. A stalemate thus ensued between the regular military forces. The Imperial General Staff considered this situation and ordered for a force which, although unable to mount a major invasion, might hit rapidly at a time and place of its own choosing and then withdraw before being overwhelmed by the Germans' superior military force. Donovan asserted that by establishing the Commandos the Imperial General Staff was merely applying the lessons which natives in India and Africa had many times taught the British: that when one's regular army had been defeated there were still ways open to harass and confuse the victorious forces.

1. For Donovan's ideas on the subject, consult:

- a. "Command Paper," 1941, in the Historical Collection.
- b. Part I, passim, Operational Groups History, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.
- c. Memorandum: Donovan, W. J., to the President, 22 December
1941, in
War Report, Office of Strategic Services (OSS),
Volume I, 294 (hereafter referred to as War Report).
- d. Memorandum: Donovan, W. J., to Chief, OSS/China Theater,
2 February 1945, in
OSS Archives - Kunming.
Reg. OP.3 - Projects: BOSTON,
Administration, etc. 149a.

The material in this section is taken from the above sources.

This paper is not concerned with tracing the organizational history of the Operational Groups. For such material, consult:

- a. Part I, Operational Groups History, in
OSS Archives - Washington,
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.
- b. War Report, passim.

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There were several basic Commando principles. Speed and mobility were stressed, because the units were designed to operate always on the attack and never on the defense. The aim was to strike, withdraw rapidly when attacked, and re-form later. In training each man was taught the necessity for individual survival, which meant that each man had to go on regardless of what happened to his neighbor. These principles of mobility and individualism were reflected in the types of weapons which the Commando used. Each man was to join with his own rifle or pistol and was to have nothing he could not carry by himself. Brens and Thompsons were used for training purposes and for specific operations as indicated. The Commandos had no elaborate radio equipment or heavy weapons. Since the units were to operate clandestinely behind enemy lines it was felt that as an aid to efficient operations and individual survival each man should if possible be familiar with the language and the terrain of the area in which he was to operate. For similar reasons, the basic organizational principle was a close personal relationship based on mutual confidence and reliance. The entire complement was therefore composed of volunteers, each of whom could withdraw at any time after reasonable notice. The officers could dismiss any man at any time for any reason.

Individual qualifications and the type of training program reflected the above principles. In general, the personal qualifications required were: youth and physical fitness; intelligence, self-reliance, and an independent frame of mind; ability to swim; immunity from sea-sickness.

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The officers were to be under forty years old and, in addition to the above qualifications, possessed of tactical ability, sound military judgment, high qualities of leadership, and dash.

Training was designed with the foregoing principles in mind. Each Commando based itself on a seaside town, in which it set itself up and trained. Each member received a daily cash allowance and instructions to find his own food and lodging. Each leader organized the details of his own training program, which stressed swimming and boating practice, night operations, rigorous weapons training, cover and concealment, silence and precision. Since it was constantly stressed that no type of operation would be unusual, there was emphasis on familiarity with foreign vehicles and weapons. Finally, the trainees attended an irregular warfare school and received considerable practical experience in manning shipboard anti-aircraft and anti-E-Boat guns.

Such was the organization which Donovan studied and which he believed should be adapted for American use. He believed in the spirit of the attack and expressed himself as follows:

"In reality the British follow the Germans in their use of special troops trained for specific purposes (their parachutists are really flying guerrillas). My observation is that the more the battle machines are perfected the greater the need in modern warfare of men calculatingly reckless with disciplined daring, who are trained for aggressive action. In all of our talk on defense, we are apt to miss the spirit of the attack. And if we were to try to develop the idea in our army it will mean a return to our old tradition of the scouts, the raiders and rangers."

He felt that another and more immediate reason to establish American

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commandos or guerrillas was that the Allies could not invade Europe for a long time to come. Such special troops could in the meantime foment and organize guerrilla warfare in occupied Europe, harass the Germans and their communications, and collect and transmit intelligence. He felt that

"as an essential part of any strategic plan, there must be recognized the need of sowing the dragon's teeth in those territories from which we must withdraw and in which the enemy will place his army....the aid of native chiefs must be obtained, the loyalty of the inhabitants be cultivated; Fifth columnists organized and placed, demolition material cached; and guerrilla bands of bold and daring men organized and installed."

He therefore urged that the United States organize at once a "guerrilla corps independent and separate from the Army and Navy, and imbued with a maximum of the offensive and imaginative spirit." This force should be disciplined and military, but similar in character, organization, and training to the British Commandos and used for the same purposes in the same manner.

In a memorandum to the War Department Donovan elaborated these ideas and proposed the creation of the First Guerrilla Group. This would comprise ten guerrilla battalions, each to be composed of bilingual personnel and organized along "area" lines. Thus, for example, the 6th Battalion would be composed of 7 Guerrilla Companies (one each of German, Dutch, Belgian, Spanish, Portuguese, and two French). It would operate from headquarters in Great Britain with the mission of "harassing and destroying" German forces in Holland, Belgium, France,

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and "adjacent territories." The 7th Battalion would be composed of 6 Guerrilla Companies (five Chinese and one Korean). It would operate from headquarters in Chungking with the mission of "harassing and destroying" Japanese forces in occupied China.

The program encountered obstacles from the beginning. In June, 1942, the War Department disapproved a proposal by some of Donovan's associates for an independent guerrilla force, because

"It is believed that full authority to conduct such operations must continue to rest with the Theatre Commander rather than be centralized as a special corps with the Headquarters in Washington."

In a November, 1942, memorandum to the War Department Donovan outlined the functions of the proposed special corps. These were to

- "(a) Organize and instruct guerrilla bands where they can be recruited in territory now occupied by the enemy.
- (b) Supply those groups offering internal resistance to the enemy with necessary arms, ammunition, demolition equipment, food, medical supplies and money.
- (c) Plan and execute the demolitions of strategic enemy military and industrial installations.
- (d) Capture enemy personnel, equipment, documents and plans."

A central authority would control the corps, but in any area where the United States had established an active theater of operations its units would "constitute an integral element" of the American forces there.

It will be noted that between 1941 and 1942 Donovan's ideas underwent two important changes. His original concept had been to maintain the Guerrilla Group independent of the regular Army and Navy. In his November,

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1942, memorandum he states categorically that the Group would be assigned to military forces in an active theater and would "constitute an integral element of such forces." Secondly, his original proposal had been to create guerrilla groups actually to conduct irregular warfare. In the November, 1942, memorandum he places more emphasis on the organization and instruction of guerrilla bands "where they can be recruited in territory now occupied by the enemy." The shift in emphasis is away from actual conduct of operations to the organization, instruction, and supply of native groups who would then actually wage the irregular warfare. These two changes are clearly reflected in the directives which made possible the creation of the operational groups and affected profoundly their organization and activities in China.

B. AUTHORIZATION AND CONTROL: PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE
AND THE OPERATIONAL GROUPS

Three Presidential orders contain the original authorizations for the establishment of what eventually became the Operational Groups.¹ The order of June 25, 1941 created the office of the Coordinator of Strategic Information and stated that the President, by virtue of his authority as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, granted to the Coordinator of Strategic Information the authority to collect, analyze, correlate, and disseminate information bearing upon the national security and in addition gave him the power to carry out, "when requested by the President, such supplementary activities as may facilitate the securing

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1. a. Military order designating a Coordinator of Strategic Information, 25 June 1941.
- b. Designating a Coordinator of Information, 11 July 1941.
- c. Military Order, Office of Strategic Services, 13 June 1942.

All of the above Presidential orders are reproduced in full in War Report, Volume I, 261, 262, 282.

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1. For a discussion of this episode of revision of the original order, see Darling, Arthur B., The Central Intelligence Agency, An Instrument of Government, 1940-1950, Chapter I, pp. 9-10 and footnotes thereto.

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of strategic information not now available to the Government." It also gave the Coordinator the authority to perform "these duties and responsibilities, which include those of a military character, under the direction and supervision of the President." Here, then, was the authority for the creation of a guerrilla force independent of the regular armed services and responsible only to the President.

On July 11, 1941, however, the order was revised to create the office of Coordinator of Information.¹ The new order showed a significant difference from its predecessor. Although the Coordinator was still authorized to "carry out, when requested by the President, such supplementary activities as may facilitate the securing of information....not now available to the Government," he was no longer responsible to none but the President. His consequent relative freedom of action was therefore curtailed. The new order provided that "Nothing in the duties and responsibilities of the Coordinator of Information shall in any way interfere with or impair the duties and responsibilities of the regular military and naval advisers of the President as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy." The regular armed services, through the action of their advisers to the President, were therefore given at least a veto power over the activities of the Coordinator of Information, if not positive control over him. While it was possible for the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to overrule their advice and himself determine the "duties and responsibilities" of the military services in a given situation, it is nevertheless clear that the substitution of this clause for the original one concerning

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the Coordinator's power to perform his duties clearly and simply "under the direction and supervision of the President" represented a definite loss of authority and freedom for the new organization and gave to the armed services an influence which they could not have had under the terms of the original Presidential order.

On June 13, 1942, a third Presidential order changed the office of the Coordinator of Information into the Office of Strategic Services.¹ The new office was no longer directly responsible to the President, but was specifically "transferred to the jurisdiction of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff" and given, among others, the duty to "Plan and operate such special services as may be directed by the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff." Furthermore, it was provided that the Director of the OSS "shall perform his duties under the direction and supervision of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff." Thus was settled the fundamental issue of who was going to control the Operational Groups. Whereas the original concept had made possible guerrilla groups operating under direct Presidential control with a large degree of independence, the new authority made certain the close supervision of any such operations by the regular military forces.

On August 17, 1942,² in answer to a request for information on OSS organization and functions and "to enable the Chiefs of Staff more efficiently to employ" OSS facilities, Donovan addressed a letter and memorandum to General Walter B. Smith, then Secretary to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He stated that SA./G³ Branch operations included the following

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1. For the sake of convenience the abbreviation "OSS" will henceforth be used.
2. The material for this part is to be found in Letter: Donovan, W. J., to Smith, W. B., August 17, 1942, with attached memorandum describing the functions of the OSS. See War Report, Volume I, 296 ff.
3. "SA./G" was the code for the Special Operations Branch, whose responsibilities at this time included guerrilla warfare operations. Not until later was the Operational Group Command clearly separated from the Special Operations Branch.

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activities. It organized and equipped secret agents or groups "to accompany or precede American forces; to cooperate with theatre commanders in.... organizing population, guerrilla activities, information, etc." It organized secret agents or groups to "stimulate and organize guerrilla warfare" in occupied areas and assisted "in the creation, organization, equipment and support in secret armies, and revolutionary groups in enemy-occupied countries." In order to illustrate more fully the Branch's plans and operations, Donovan supplied extracts from the Director of the Branch to himself. The "training doctrine" of the Special Operations schools stressed the development of saboteurs to operate alone or in "small groups (not to exceed 6)," as well as methods of influencing the native population tacitly to approve, if not actively participate in, subversive operations. This training was felt necessary because of the native populations' power to wreck, or at least to hamper seriously, such operations. The training did not specifically include guerrilla warfare operations and tactics, but plans provided "for an extension of the training to include guerrilla units" composed of individuals able to speak a foreign language. Theater commanders would control operations wherever the United States had established an active theater. Elsewhere the OSS would direct operations under the policies "dictated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff." This document contains several points of interest. The entire guerrilla program is as yet in its very early stages, since Donovan's memorandum of November, 1942 (discussed above), urges the creation of a special corps to do virtually the same things which are presented

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in this August, 1942, discussion. The contents of this memorandum reflect, of course, the basic principle of general control by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as provided for in the order creating the OSS, and control by the Theater Commander in theaters of operations. The concept of guerrilla warfare is a limited one in comparison with Donovan's original ideas, since the emphasis is on irregular operations conducted by native forces which shall have been organized by Americans, rather than on operations conducted by American irregular forces themselves. Sabotage is stressed and American guerrilla operations only deemed possible at some future, unspecified, date.

From December, 1942, to December, 1944, six basic documents refined and clarified the relationship of the OSS to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and thereby affected the problem of control of the Operational Groups and the tactical doctrine concerning their use in the field.¹ All of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directives, J.C.S. 155/4/D, J.C.S. 155/7/D, and J.C.S. 155/11/D, began by reaffirming that the OSS had been established as an operating agency under the "direction and supervision" of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The OSS was then designated by the first two as the agency charged in general with "the planning, development, coordination, and execution of the military program for psychological warfare."

While the OSS was charged with the responsibility for the execution of psychological warfare operations as indicated above, it had no

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1. These documents are as follows. Material for this discussion is taken from them.

1. J.C.S. 155/4/D, December 23, 1942. "Functions of the Office of Strategic Services." Reproduced in War Report, Volume I, 379-383.
2. O.S.S. General Order #9, issued 3 January 1943, effective 4 January 1943. Reproduced in War Report, Volume I, 385-390.
3. J.C.S. 155/7/D, April 4, 1943. "Functions of the Office of Strategic Services." Reproduced in War Report, Volume I, 394-398.
4. J.C.S. 155/11/D, 27 October 1943. "Functions of the Office of Strategic Services." Reproduced in War Report, Volume I, 413-418.
5. O.S.S. General Order #9, Revised, issued 26 May 1944, effective 26 May 1944. Reproduced in War Report, Volume I, 419-428.
6. O.S.S. General Order #9, Revised, issued 26 December 1944, effective 26 December 1944. Reproduced in War Report, Volume I, 429-440.

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authority over their planning, equipment, or supply, all of which functions were cooperative interdepartmental enterprises. Under the heading of "Specific Duties" J.C.S. 155/4/D and J.C.S. 155/7/D made this clear. The former stated: "The following duties are specifically assigned to the Office of Strategic Services: (a) In consultation with other interested Government agencies, the initiation, formulation, and development of plans for psychological warfare in furtherance of actual or planned military operations. (b) In cooperation with other interested Government agencies, the development of psychological warfare doctrine. (c) The progressive and orderly development of operating procedure and the characteristics of special weapons and special equipment for special operations not assigned or pertinent to other Government agencies. (d) The organization, equipment, and training of such individuals or organizations as may be required for special operations not assigned to other Government agencies. (e) The conduct of special operations not assigned to other Government agencies or under the direct control of Theater or Area Commanders." J.C.S. 155/7/D repeated these provisions with minor changes in phraseology making clearer the roles of the War and Navy Departments.

The internal organization of J.C.S. 155/11/D is somewhat different, but does not present any major changes from the two earlier directives. It stated that the Office of Strategic Services was "designated as the agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff charged with the functions and duties

described" in the ensuing paragraphs. Under the heading of "Secret Operations" OSS was held responsible for physical subversion, including sabotage, contact with underground groups, organization and conduct of guerrilla warfare, and the organization, equipment, and training of "such special individuals or organizations as may be required for special operations not assigned to other Government agencies." The development of weapons and special equipment by the OSS was subject to approval by the Office of Scientific Research and Development, after which "further development or procurement" was the responsibility of the appropriate military and naval supply agencies. Concerning the actual procurement of weapons, equipment, and supplies, they were to be "programmed and procured in accordance with the pertinent Joint Chiefs of Staff directives and current Army and Navy instructions based thereon." The assignment of responsibility to OSS without authority is evident.

All three J.C.S. Directives stated clearly a concept of psychological warfare operations and provided specific means for putting this doctrinal principle into action. J.C.S. 155/4/D and J.C.S. 155/7/D respectively stated that "Psychological warfare functions assigned to the Office of Strategic Services will be conducted in strict accordance with the following: (a) The military program for psychological warfare is restricted to operations conducted in direct support of actual or planned military operations..." and that "Psychological warfare operations are supplementary to and must be coordinated with military operations." J.C.S. 155/11/D stated that the OSS was in general to "furnish essential

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intelligence for the planning and execution of approved strategic services." It defined "strategic services" as follows: "all measures (except those pertaining to the Federal program of radio, press, publication and related foreign propaganda activities involving the dissemination of information) taken to enforce our will upon the enemy by means other than military action, as may be applied in support of actual or planned military operations or in furtherance of the war effort." It assigned to the OSS the planning, development, training for, and execution of such services and the development of doctrine to govern them. Psychological warfare is thus considered essentially tied to, and subordinate to, regular military operations.

All three Directives made specific provisions for an OSS Planning Group, described as a "joint medium," to ensure that psychological warfare (or strategic services) operations were "coordinated with military operations." The Planning Group was composed of one member appointed by the Secretary of State, two by the Army, two by the Navy, and four (including the Chairman), by the Director of the OSS. It will be noted that despite the OSS possession of the Chairmanship the OSS members were in a minority. The Planning Group members were freed from other duties, to enable them to devote their full time to the Group. The Group was served by an Advisory Committee, composed originally of permanent membership from the Board ("Office" in J.C.S. 155/11/D) of Economic Warfare, Office of War Information (this member was dropped from the two later Directives), Coordinator of

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Inter-American Affairs, and Treasury Department, together with representatives from other Government agencies who might be called upon to serve from time to time. The Advisory Committee was to advise the Planning Group of ways in which their agencies could help psychological warfare plans. All three Directives provide that "all major projects and plans" for psychological warfare (or strategic services) operations must be integrated with military and naval programs by the Planning Group. Then, after approval by the Director of OSS, such plans were to be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff through the Joint Staff Planners for "final approval." It will be noted that in this process the authority of the OSS was essentially the negative one of withholding approval. The means of breaking a possible deadlock between Planning Group and Director was not defined.

Once plans for psychological warfare had been approved, there remained the question of control of the actual operations. In each Directive this control was vested in the Theater Commander "within organized theaters or areas." OSS officers and agents were under his direct control and compelled to inform him concerning all plans and projects and the current status thereof. They were forbidden to engage in any activity which he did not approve. J.C.S. 155/11/D went further in this matter of the Theater Commander's role than did its predecessors and stated that he was "authorized to utilize the organization and facilities of the Office of Strategic Services in his theater or area in any manner and to the

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maximum extent desired by him." A Theater Commander could thus refuse to employ the OSS or its programs in any manner at all.

Concerning specific authorization for a guerrilla force, or commando organization, the three Directives were brief but specific. It will be recalled that in June, 1942, the War Department disapproved the formation of an independent Guerrilla Group with central headquarters in Washington. J.C.S. 155/4/D stated that "unless otherwise specifically authorized, personnel to be provided for guerrilla warfare will be limited to organizers, fomenters, and operational nuclei of guerrilla units." J.C.S. 155/7/D and J.C.S. 155/11/D repeated this limitation in the main, but omitted the qualifying clause of the first directive. The difference between the J.C.S. Directives and Donovan's original plans is evident. The "operational nuclei" concept had now become official and the idea of purely American guerrilla groups eliminated.

OSS General Orders issued to conform with the J.C.S. directives reflected their requirements insofar as what became the Operational Groups were concerned. General Order No. 9, effective as of January 4, 1943, was first issued to conform with J.C.S. 155/4/D and was twice revised in 1944 to conform with J.C.S. 155/11/D. The original General Order did not set up separate organizations for sabotage, contact with and supply of partisan groups, and guerrilla warfare operations. All such activities were placed under the Special Operations Branch, which was directed to "organize, train and employ operational nuclei for guerrilla

warfare." The May, 1944, revision separated the Operational Groups from the Special Operations Branch and held them responsible for:

- "(1) The selection and training of operational nuclei for the activation of resistance groups in carrying out guerrilla operations.
- (2) Furnishing fighting officer patrols to invasion commanders.
- (3) Coup de main.
- (4) Attacking selected targets."

The December, 1944, revision was identical to that of May, 1944, insofar as the Operational Groups' functions were concerned. The only difference between the two revisions is that in the later one the Operational Groups were now clearly and distinctly the operating units of an Operational Group Command, which had its own organization distinct from the Special Operations Branch.

Certain things are clear from the foregoing presentation of the concept of psychological warfare and the development of the organization for the conduct of its operations. At the outset Donovan and his associates envisaged an organization centrally controlled from Washington and independent of, although coordinated with, the regular armed forces. This organization would possess operating units designed to harass small enemy formations, installations, and lines of communications. The personnel would be bi-lingual and familiar, if possible, with the terrain of the country in which they would operate. Tactically speaking, the units would attack and then withdraw rapidly when confronted with stronger force. Defense was not considered. Speed and adaptability to all

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circumstances were to be the keynotes. While sabotage and organization of native groups were among the missions of these proposed guerrilla units, their primary purpose would be the conduct of guerrilla warfare. Under this concept, therefore, psychological warfare is something distinct from, while at the same time coordinated with, regular military operations.

These ideas underwent important changes between their formulation and their application. The first change was a fundamental one, which subordinated psychological warfare in concept to regular military operations. The second fundamental change gave to the OSS the responsibility for planning and conducting psychological warfare operations, but subjected it to outside control at the planning level (the OSS Planning Group), at the highest command level (the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and in the field (the Theater commander). In short, OSS had the responsibility, but not the authority to discharge that responsibility. Psychological warfare was thus considered subordinate and was an interdepartmental activity at every level, with decision and control in the last analysis in the hands of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Theater Commander.

C. OPERATIONAL GROUPS IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER, 1944

In some respects the recruiting and training of the Operational Groups resembled strongly the ideas which Donovan had brought back from

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his study of the British Commandos and had incorporated in the paper which he wrote and submitted to President Roosevelt in December, 1941.

Early in 1943 the War Department made available to the Operational Groups slightly more than 500 slots.¹ The recruiting procedure required that recruits must be "physically fit, mentally alert, aggressive in spirit."² Consequently, most of the early volunteers came from regular line outfits such as the Infantry and Engineers. The Signal Corps and Medical Corps supplied radio operators and medical technicians respectively. As in the Commando system, each individual who volunteered and who met the basic requirements of physical ability and foreign-language facility was given a personal interview. During this he was told enough to acquaint him with the broad outlines of the organization and given a chance to enroll. Those with an earnest desire for such duty were selected, the others were permitted to withdraw. Eventually there were organized operational groups of American soldiers, most of whom spoke both English and either French, Italian, Greek, Yugoslav, Norwegian, or German. This general principle of recruitment was not always followed, since many of the men spoke only English.

The Operational Group training program assumed that the recruits had finished basic training and that therefore this additional training would be on an advanced level. These programs resembled the training described by Donovan in his study of the British Commandos. In general, the following subjects were included: demolition work; American and foreign small arms; scouting and patrolling; living off the land; first

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1. OG History, Part I, p. 20, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.
2. See OG History, Part I, pp. 20-21, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch
Washington - OG History.

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1. OG History, Part I, pp. 14-15, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.

See also War Report, Volume I, 324-325, for further information
on OSS training programs in 1942.
2. OG History, Part I, pp. 43-48, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.

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aid; enemy organization; interrogation techniques; infantry, commando, and Special Operations tactics; American and foreign motor vehicles; amphibious operations.¹ A typical two-week tactical course included the following subjects and number of hours devoted to each:²

Map Reading	14	Hours
Scouting & Patrolling	22	"
Fieldcraft	6	"
Close Combat & Knife Fighting	4	"
Pistol	6	"
T.S.M.G.	3	"
Tactics	38	"
Tactical Appreciation for Officers	2	"
Obstacles	4	"
Medical Conference	1	"
Lecture - German Organisation	1	"
- Security	1	"
P.T., Swimming & Cross-Country Runs	7	"
Communications, Conference & Demonstration	1	"
Current Events	1	"
Training Films	4	"
Showdown Inspection	2	"
Review of Training	1	"

TOTAL - - - 118 Hours

Of the time devoted to tactics nine hours were spent on a study of day and night operations, followed by seven hours spent on day and night airborne raids. The final problem in tactics was to devote three hours on reconnaissance of a target, three hours on planning a raid, and three hours on execution of the raid and withdrawal. The importance in the course of map reading, scouting and patrolling, and tactics is clear, since these three courses together made up 74 hours of a total of 118.

The original Operational Groups training program was later revised by ex-Commando Major Joseph E. Alderdice and Lt. Colonel Alfred T. Cox.

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Both had been at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, for which they had designed the "Jungle Jim" course. Cox later parachuted into France with a section of the "French" Operational Groups and then became the Commanding Officer of the Operational Groups in China, thus bringing to China a wealth of experience in the field of special operations.

The standard Operational Group field organization was the "Group" of four officers and thirty enlisted men. Since the units were to operate independently and usually behind enemy lines, radio operators and medical technicians were included to provide communication with the home base and to render emergency medical treatment in the field. The group was usually subdivided on paper into two combat "Sections," each of fifteen men, including a radio operator and medical technician. Each section was in turn divided into two squads. In actual practice, however, this scheme was not followed rigidly, since units in the field varied in size from three men (one officer and two enlisted men including a radio operator) to a unit as large as, or slightly larger than, the group itself. Flexibility according to circumstance was, as in the original concept, the keynote of organizational policy.

The original principle of having each man basically armed only with a rifle or pistol was abandoned, however, in the interests of greater firepower and the demands of sabotage, since in practice the units were regularly armed with automatic rifles, machine guns, bazookas, demolition explosives, and booby traps. Experience demonstrated the need for such weapons and equipment.¹

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1. For the material on organization and weapons, see War Report, Volume II, 170, 204-205.
OG History, Part I, pp. 21-22, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.

23

1. See p.17 above, in B. AUTHORIZATION AND CONTROL: PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE AND THE OPERATIONAL GROUPS.
2. OG History, Part II, p. 5, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.
3. War Report, Volume II, 205.

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It will be recalled that the J.C.S. Directives discussed above¹ specified that American participation in guerrilla warfare was to be limited to "organizers, fomenters, and operational nuclei of guerrilla units" and that the OSS General Orders which followed these basic directives repeated these provisions. It is therefore of interest to summarize briefly and generally the use made in Europe of the Operational Groups.

They operated "prior to Allied invasion or enemy withdrawal in Europe....behind the enemy's defenses." They attacked enemy lines of communication and hampered his withdrawals. They worked with "the militant Resistance....and made such resistance the more effective in its integration with the effort of Supreme Allied Headquarters."² In France the Operational Groups "protected the flanks of Allied forces driving in from the beaches, ambushed German columns and blocked their progress, destroyed enemy supply and communication lines and forced the enemy to divert troops for their protection. In addition to this sabotage and guerrilla warfare, OG's arranged supply drops, armed and equipped resistance groups and instructed them in the use of American and British explosives."³ They also protected industrial installations from destruction, guarded lines of communication, and did considerable to raise the morale of the French Resistance by providing tangible evidence of American power.

One activity, however, which raised doubts in the minds of many and which was to be an important factor in the Operational Group

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activities in China, was their use as virtual regular infantry troops of the line. There was considerable feeling that such operations were a tactical misuse of the Operational Groups and made demands on them which they had never been designed to meet. The enemy was therefore not harmed to the extent that he might have been.

There is available for the purposes of this paper some evidence concerning these points from both Allied and German sources. At the conclusion of his unit's operations in southern France in August and September, 1944, Cox wrote a short paper commenting on some of the features of Operational Group activities and the coordination with the French Resistance. He paid high tribute both to the people of the Resistance and to Operational Group activities. He felt, however, that the Resistance could have been more effective if there had not been such a tendency to concentrate efforts (the Operational Groups participated in these operations) on the liberation of very large towns. He says, significantly: "The Germans held what they wanted as long as they wanted to. When they moved out the P.F.I. moved in and the town was proclaimed 'liberated', with plenty of huge headlines." The Resistance lacked arms, discipline, training, and leadership and was unable to operate successfully against an enemy determined to defend his positions. Many good targets for true guerrilla operations were neglected in favor of "more spectacular projects." One of the chief deterrents to more efficient operations was, in France as elsewhere in Europe, the political situation. Resistance groups tended very definitely to keep an eye on future postwar politics as much as on

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present military and guerrilla problems. Cox felt for this reason that the inclusion of Frenchmen in the effort to coordinate Resistance forces was a mistake and that the employment of only British and American personnel for such duties would have prevented a good deal of the political strife which hampered the irregular warfare effort against the Germans.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German Commander-in-Chief South from late 1941 to early 1945, has devoted a chapter in his memoirs to the partisan warfare which the Allies carried on in Italy during 1943-1945.¹ The partisan bands began to appear during the fall and winter of 1943-1944, but were not considered really dangerous until May and June, 1944. Beginning in the latter month "the Partisan war was an actual menace to our military operations and it was vital to remove it."² The reason was that "the Partisans might critically affect the retirement of my armies ..."³ As the partisan organization grew it began to threaten or actually control certain areas in the German rear areas. However, these partisan efforts "were only a vital menace where they were directly co-ordinated with military operations."⁴

Kesselring describes guerrilla aims, activities, and methods as follows:⁵

"Apart from a general harassing of our troops, the main purpose of these guerillas was to disorganize and hold up our supplies on the route through Villach into Italy and traffic to Yugoslavia from the west and north. In the mountains east of the line Fiume - Trieste - Gorizia the mass of the population were in sympathy with them."

and

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1. Kesselring, Field Marshal, Memoirs (Hudson, L., tr.), London, 1953, Chapter 21 (The Partisan War in Italy).
2. Ibid., p. 225.
3. Ibid., p. 230.
4. Ibid., p. 231.

The use of the phrase "directly co-ordinated with military operations" is of interest, because it appeared so often in the course of the formulation of American guerrilla policy (see above) in 1941-1942. What Kesselring evidently means here is that the harassment, sabotage, and other such activities were a vital menace when so co-ordinated. He makes no reference to the frequent use of guerrilla bands as virtual regular infantry units, to attack or defend fixed positions.

5. Ibid., p. 225.

26

1. Ibid., p. 227.
2. Ibid., p. 227.
3. The material from which this summary of German policy is taken will be found in Ibid., pp. 229-231.

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26 (contd.)

4. See also Blumentritt, General G., Von Rundstedt, the Soldier and the Man (Reavely, C., tr.), London, 1952, p. 217-219. The author speaks in these pages of the effectiveness of the French Resistance in 1944 when its guerrilla units devoted themselves to hit-and-run attacks on "strategic" objectives, such as communications and supply lines. Reinforcement and resupply became increasingly difficult for the Germans to carry out adequately. In addition, the Germans were compelled to divert ever larger numbers of troops to the duty of protecting these supply lines. General Blumentritt thus confirms the testimony of Field Marshal Kesselring and, from the American side, that of both Donovan and Cox concerning the way in which to utilize most effectively the operational groups. Their value for true guerrilla warfare operations was much greater than their effectiveness as regular infantry assault units.

See also Paget, R. T., Manstein, His Campaigns and His Trial, London, 1951, p. 30-66 passim, and p. 137-160. This book is primarily an account of the author's role as defense counsel for the German Field Marshal against the ex post facto legal charges lodged against him after World War II. In the pages referred to, however, there will be found some material on the organization for and conduct of guerrilla warfare by the Russians against the Germans. It will be noticed that this type of warfare was waged in the manner envisaged by Donovan and Cox and described by Blumentritt and Kesselring.

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"To the work of these bands must be ascribed most of the many acts of sabotage to military installations, dumps, railways, roads, bridges and telegraph lines ..."¹

and

"Only in a very few exceptional cases did the bands accept fair fight; once they had stealthily done their mischief or if a sense of inferiority made them break off a fight they melted away among the civilian population or as innocent country hikers."²

Kesselring concluded by June, 1944, that the battle against the Allied armies at the front and that against the guerrillas in the rear areas formed an "indivisible whole" and set out to deal with the latter by strong military means. He adopted two principal military policies.³ The first of these was to carry on an "early and continuous 'enemy reconnaissance'" against the guerrillas. The second was to form independently and locally organized raiding detachments. These were prepared to employ countermeasures at any time all through the rear areas and were armed with all types of front-line weapons, such as tanks, artillery, and flame throwers. Once the reconnaissance units had located guerrilla bands the troops went into action with the aim of trapping the partisans in their areas and destroying them. As Kesselring pointed out, "the capture of a Partisan hide-out was of no practical use unless they defended it."⁴

Three conclusions emerge from a study of the chapter on partisan warfare. First is that the guerrillas were able to inflict considerable damage to German communications and installations. Second is that the Germans were, by the use of vigorous military countermeasures, able to maintain their positions and conduct their regular military operations in Italy. Third is that guerrilla operations forced the enemy to employ considerable numbers of regular troops in his efforts against them and thereby

assisted the Allies considerably. These bear out Cox's contention that the Germans held what they wanted to and that it was a mistake to devote time and effort to attacking towns and larger regular enemy units when there were so many good targets for true guerrilla operations. Evidently the policy of harassment, in Italy as well as in France, paid greater dividends than the effort to use guerrilla units for tasks properly the province of regular military operations. Both Cox and Kesselring agreed on that point and bear out Donovan's contention that guerrilla bands were, by their very nature, unable to meet regular troops on the latter's ground.

Another problem was the military commanders' relative lack of understanding of the purpose and use of Operational Groups. The Groups' effectiveness was lessened because they were often not put into their areas soon enough. One observer¹ felt that only the "Greek" Operational Group units functioned as they should have. The "Italian" units worked well, "but they were new in the Mediterranean field and their peculiar qualifications were perhaps not sufficiently understood by AFHQ. Their employment seems to lack cohesion, their energies seem to have been to some degree dissipated." The "French" groups were not put into France soon enough (a point also made by Cox). Furthermore, "ETO did not seem to have a proper understanding of the function of OG." Administrative confusion handicapped operations. Despite all these difficulties, this observer held that the Operational Groups in France worked well. The "Yugoslav" units were jeopardized by the complex political situation in Yugoslavia, where the native resistance forces definitely preferred only to receive supplies.

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1. OG History, Part I, pp. 4-5, in
OSS Archives - Washington.
43. Washington - History Branch.
Washington - OG History.

28

1. Operational Groups casualty figures in Europe will be of some interest. While there were no complete figures available at the time the War Report was printed, the figures for operations in France might serve as a general guide.

The Operational Groups suffered 10 men (or 2.6 percent of the total engaged) killed; 4 men (or 1.1 percent) missing in action or taken prisoner; and 40 men (or 11.2 percent) wounded or injured.

These figures will be found in War Report, Volume II, 220.

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It was felt after the conclusion of operations in the European Theater that the training received was good. Some remarked that actual operations were less arduous than the training received, a statement which speaks well for the instruction. There was general agreement that foreign military terms, radio maintenance and repair, and operation of foreign vehicles and weapons should have been stressed more than they were during the training period. The chief criticism of the armament of the Groups was that more long-range weapons should have been supplied.¹

D. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

The purpose of the foregoing study has not been to present either a complete analysis of the British Commandos or of the American Operational Groups in Europe. Rather it has been to give a general picture of these subjects to serve as an introduction to the Chinese activities of the Operational Groups, since many characteristics of the operations in China had their origin in the events of these earlier days of the Second World War. The purpose has therefore been to present the salient features of the original Commando concept and to note some of the more significant factors affecting it.

The OSS was given the responsibility for the organization and conduct of guerrilla warfare. The decision was made, however, to subordinate psychological warfare operations (including guerrilla warfare) to regular

military operations and to grant exclusive control over them to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to the Theater Commanders. Consequently, OSS did not have full authority to plan such operations because the interdepartmental Planning Group was the body specifically designated to formulate projects. The Director of OSS did retain the power of approval, which, however, was an essentially negative one. These facts affected operations in Europe and should be kept in mind, since they influenced greatly the use of the Operational Groups in China in 1945. Despite the valorous deeds of the Operational Groups in Europe, there was a feeling that they might have accomplished even more, had there been a more complete understanding of their true nature and purpose and had they received greater freedom of action. Operational Group activities were in China even more strictly subordinated to regular military operations; it was also felt that they were not used there in the manner for which they were designed.

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